

THE

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Gift of C. Rich Esq. of London

TRUE STATE

OF THE

CASE,

RESPECTING THE

INSURRECTION

AT

ST. DOMINGO.

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INSURRECTION
AT
ST. DOMINGO.

AS the West India Planters and others have insinuated that the foundation of the Insurrection in St. Domingo, was laid in the efforts of such of the Gentlemen of Great Britain, as have associated themselves for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, I think it will be peculiarly proper at the present time to make a few remarks on the subject of Insurrections of Slaves.

It is impossible for any one to have read the History of Greece and Rome with attention, without knowing that there were many and bloody Insurrections of the Slaves in the countries which their Histories respectively comprehend.—Now it is impossible to attribute these with any propriety to persons associated either for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, or of personal slavery; because, it does not appear from History, that there ever were associations in those days for so laudable a purpose.

Whoever, again, has read the History of the West India Islands from their first establishment to the year 1786, must have read it very superficially, not to know, that there have been

been various Insurrections of the Slaves there, within this period. There was formerly a bloody one at St. Domingo, besides that which has lately happened. There have been several in Jamaica, and other Islands have had their share of them also.

Now, it is impossible that any of these could have had their origin in the efforts of the Gentlemen associated for the Abolition; because it was not till 1787, that the first Committee was formed, which was in London, for the Abolition of this execrable Trade.

To what cause then may we attribute the Insurrections in the Islands? Undoubtedly to the Slave Trade, in consequence of which thousands are annually poured into the Islands, who have been fraudulently and forcibly deprived of the Rights of Men. All these come into them of course with dissatisfied and exasperated minds; and this discontent and feeling of resentment must be farther heightened by the treatment which people coming into them under such a situation must unavoidably receive; for we cannot keep people in a state of subjection to us, who acknowledge no obligation whatever to serve us, but by breaking their spirits and treating them as creatures of another species. Now, that this is the cause is evident from Mr. Long, the celebrated champion of the Planters themselves, who states in his History of Jamaica, that all the Insurrections of the Slaves that he could ever trace in the Islands, were begun by the imported Africans, and never by the Creole, or island-born, Slaves.

Such

Such then being actually the cause, and this being likely from common reason to be the cause while Men have the Passions of Men, and this cause being adequate of itself, at all times, to produce the effect, what reason can there be for imagining that the Insurrection in St. Domingo proceeded from any other source; particularly as these Insurrections have been as numerous before any association for the ABOLITION of the SLAVE TRADE took place as since their institution? As, however, the present Insurrection in St. Domingo is somewhat connected with the late Revolution in France, it may be necessary to say a few words upon it as relative to that event.

As soon as the news of this Revolution was conveyed to St. Domingo, the white People there divided into Parties, as in the Mother Country, the one for the Revolution, the other for the Government in its ancient form.

Again, as soon as the principles of that Revolution, as particularized in the Declaration of the Bill of Rights, was proclaimed in that Colony, a third Party, and that a formidable one, arose. This consisted of the People of Colour,* who, notwithstanding many of them had received a liberal education, and were in many instances larger Proprietors

* This term includes Free Negroes, and all such as have the smallest mixture of negro-blood; many of whom are as white as any of the native West Indians.

prietors in the Island than the Whites, were in a depressed and degraded state. They felt forcibly the justice of these principles; and when they considered that these were held out by the Representatives of the Parent Country, they determined to assert their right to equal privileges with the rest of the Colonists. In consequence of this they held a Meeting, after which they sent several worthy Persons of their own body to Paris, to represent them in the National Assembly of France.

On their arrival they found their way to the Bureau de Verification, where it was necessary for them to have their Claim to representation ascertained and sanctioned, before they could be admitted as Deputies into the assembly.

The White Planters, however, who happened to have seats in the National Assembly at the time, found means to crowd into this Bureau or Committee just mentioned, with a view of hindering the deputies from the People of Colour from having a place in the same legislative body with themselves. They pretended to find some flaw in their powers, and put off the further consideration of the subject for a few weeks.—At the end of this time, in consequence of the great exertions of the Deputies of Colour, they were obliged to resume the consideration of the case; they then acknowledged their error, gave up the legality of the flaw as first stated, but pretended to have discovered one of another nature. In this way they put off the Deputies from Committee to Committee, hindering them by these means from coming

coming before the Assembly at all.—When at last, one of the Deputies of the name of Ogé, a Man of Property, Education and Abilities, but of much stronger Passions than his Colleagues, returned to St. Domingo to represent to their Constituents the treatment they had met with from the White Planters in France.

His representation of the case soon reached the ears of some of the Whites of St. Domingo, who communicated the intelligence to others of their own description, which produced a determination in them to make a victim of Ogé, by taking away his life. They attacked him and a few of his adherents at various times in armed parties, some of whom he defeated, and from others he was obliged to fly; pressed however at last, he was obliged to take refuge in the Spanish part of the Island, where he was treacherously given up, and soon after, though he was never publicly examined, he was broken alive on the wheel with twenty-five of his followers. This barbarous destruction of a person whom the People of Colour so generally and deservedly esteemed, only widened the breach between them and the Whites of the Island, and exasperated them to wreak their revenge upon the latter. While they were planning schemes with this view, news arrived in the Colony that those of their deputies who, after Ogé's departure, had remained in France, had by their perseverance obtained a hearing before the National Assembly; which on the same day decreed that all the People of Colour born of free parents were Frenchmen, and of course entitled to all the privileges of French-

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men, and among others to that of being represented also. —This news when received at St. Domingo as much exasperated the White Inhabitants, * as the death of Ogé had the People of Colour there; and their breasts began to burn with a spirit of revenge against the latter.

Here then we see no less than three factions prevalent at the same moment in St. Domingo. The Whites divided into two parties, as they adhered to the new Constitution or the old; and the Whites and People of Colour burning with a fury hardly satiable but by the extirpation of one another. What then did the negroes do at this interesting moment? Seeing their Lords and Masters not able to agree among themselves, but at daggers drawn with one another, they determined to take advantage of the divisions among them, and to assert their violated rights by force of arms. —Such is the true state of the case respecting the Insurrection at St. Domingo, and what do we learn from it but the following truth? “That the Slave Trade, and the oppression naturally resulting from it, was the real and only cause of this Insurrection,” as it ever has been, and ever will be, of similar events; but that the Revolution of France, by causing the three divisions before mentioned,

* Whose vanity and guilty obstinacy made them perjure themselves by refusing to execute the Concordat, which they had sworn to twice, and produced the dreadful effusion of blood, so much to be lamented.

did afford the Negroes an opportunity which they would otherwise not so easily have found, of endeavouring to vindicate for themselves the unalterable Rights of Men.

The above accounts then lead us to three separate conclusions: First, That the Slave Trade is the real cause of all West India Insurrections.—Secondly, That as long as it exists, so long may these Insurrections be expected.—And Thirdly, That the St. Domingo Insurrection, in particular, so far from affording us a just argument (as the Planters say) to discontinue our exertions at the present moment, calls upon us to redouble them, if we have any value for our own Islands, or any wish that the present Proprietors of them may preserve their estates to themselves, and perpetuate them to their posterity.

T. CLARKSON.

P. S. The circumstance of having been at Paris during the residence of the Deputies of Colour there, has afforded me this opportunity of giving you the above Information.